

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for tracking items in a package delivery system, comprising:

5 writing into a plurality of storage labels, each of the labels associated with an item, information concerning delivery of the items, said information useful for automated sorting and tracking the items along their passage to destinations;

10 transporting the items and their associated labels;

applying query signals to the labels to retrieve the information and to cause said labels to provide said information by means of energy of the query signals received by the labels;

15 sorting the items by means of the information retrieved; and

delivering the sorted items to destinations.

2. The method of claim 1, said labels having transmitters, said query signals causing the labels to transmit said information by means of the transmitters.

3. The method of claim 1, said applying step applying the signals by means of wireless communication.

4. The method of claim 1, said system having a plurality of local collection outlets, said writing step being performed at the outlets.

30 5. The method of claim 4, said system having a plurality of local collection hubs, each hub for collecting packages from a corresponding number of outlets, said transporting step transporting the items from said corresponding number of outlets to each of

said hubs, said applying step applying the signals at the hubs, and said sorting step sorting the items at each of the hubs.

6. The method of claim 5, said transporting step transporting the items from one or more local hubs to a plurality of distribution centers or a central sorting hub, said applying and causing steps applying the signals to the items and causing the labels to provide said information at the centers or the central sorting hub, said sorting step sorting the items at the centers or the central sorting hub.

7. The method of claim 1, said writing step writing information related to name, address, telephone number or zip code related to destinations, or tracking number or special delivery instructions.

8. The method of claim 1, further comprising sending the information retrieved to a central computer for tracking the items.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein said writing step includes contacting the labels by a label writer.

10. The method of claim 1, further comprising attaching the labels to their associated items after the writing step.

11. A system for tracking items in package delivery comprising:

a plurality of storage labels;  
means for writing into each of said plurality of storage labels, information concerning delivery of an

associated item, said information useful for automated sorting and tracking the items along their passage to destinations;

5 means for transporting the items with their associated labels;

means for applying query signals to the labels to retrieve the information, said labels providing said information by means of energy of the query signals received by the labels;

10 means for sorting the items by means of the information retrieved; and

means for delivering the sorted items to destinations.

15 12. The system of claim 11, said labels having transmitters for providing said information, said transmitters being powered by energy of the query signals.

13. The system of claim 11, said writing means including a reader/writer and a host computer.

20 14. The system of claim 11, said applying means including one or more portable data readers each of which includes a transceiver that transmits the query signals and receives said information from the labels through wireless communication.

25 15. The system of claim 11, further comprising a plurality of local collection outlets, said writing means being located at the outlets.

30 16. The system of claim 15, said system having a plurality of local collection hubs, each hub for collection packages from a corresponding number of

5       outlets, said transporting means transporting the items from said corresponding number of outlets to each of said hubs, said applying means applying the signals at the hubs, and said sorting means sorting the items at each of the hubs.

10       17. The system of claim 11, further comprising a plurality of local hubs, said transporting means transporting the items to the hubs, said applying and causing means applying the query signals and receiving said information provided by the labels at the hubs.

15       18. The system of claim 17, said sorting means sorting the items at the hubs using the retrieved information.

20       19. The system of claim 11, further comprising a plurality of distribution centers and/or a central hub, said transporting means transporting the items from the hubs to the centers and/or the central hub, said applying means applying the query signals and receiving said information provided by the labels at the centers and/or the central hub.

25       20. The system of claim 11, wherein said labels include no energy source, or controller or microprocessor and are suitable for attachment to the items.